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Narrative Text

WELCOME to the exegesis of the Proem of Colossians 1.3-8.

This is part one of a two part study of Colossians 1.3-8 in the Biblical Insights Commentary series. In this exegesis of the scripture text we will seek to establish the best possible historical meaning of the text. The video you are watching now represents a summation of [the revised commentary text of Col. 1.3-8](#). Here we are focused on the 'then' meaning of the text.

In part two on Exposition, the focus will shift to the 'now' application of the text to our time. That video will also summarize [the part two text commentary](#). The modern application of the scripture text is based on the derived historical meaning of the text. Suggestions for both sermons and teaching plans will be given. The commentary text for both sections will range between 35 and 55 pages total. The two videos will extend around 40 to 60 minutes total.

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C & L Ventures



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First, let's acquaint ourselves with the original language of this letter of Paul. Here is a reading of the Koine Greek text of Colossians 1.3-8.

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3 Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, 4 ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους 5 διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, ἣν προηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου 6 τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς, καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ 7 καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν, ὅς ἐστιν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 8 ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι.

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3 Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, 4 ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους 5 διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, ἣν προηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου 6 τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς, καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ 7 καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν, ὅς ἐστιν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 8 ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι.

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What does this say? Here is a literal translation of the above Greek text over into English.

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What does this say?
Here is a literal translation of the above Greek text over into English.

Col1.3-8 Eng Txt.wav*

"3 We are giving thanks to God, Father of the Lord our Jesus Christ always, concerning you praying, 4 after having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you possess for all the saints 5 because of the hope that is stored up for you in the heavenlies, which you heard before in the word of Truth of the Gospel, 6 which came among you, just as also in all the world it is bearing fruit and growing just as also in you, from the very day you heard and came to understand the grace of God in Truth; 7 just as you were taught by Epaphras our beloved fellow servant, who is faithful in our behalf as a servant of Christ, 8 who also informed us of your love in the Spirit."

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"3 We are giving thanks to God, Father of the Lord our Jesus Christ always, concerning you praying, 4 after having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you possess for all the saints 5 because of the hope that is stored up for you in the heavenlies, which you heard before in the word of Truth of the Gospel, 6 which came among you, just as also in all the world it is bearing fruit and growing just as also in you, from the very day you heard and came to understand the grace of God in Truth; 7 just as you were taught by Epaphras our beloved fellow servant, who is faithful in our behalf as a servant of Christ, 8 who also informed us of your love in the Spirit."



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who is faithful in your behalf as a servant of Christ, & who also informed us of your love in the Spirit.”

By this point you may have noticed a hugely long single English sentence in the above translation that covers verses three through eight. That’s because in the original Greek text there is only one sentence in this passage. The main clause of this sentence is made up of the first three words: *Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ*, which translate as “we give thanks to God.” Everything else is secondary idea expansion off the main clause. This is why [modern translations](#) will break up this single sentence into multiple sentences. With this we have encountered our first major difference between the ‘then’ and the ‘now’ meaning in the text.

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The lengthy beginning sentence of this document contains 89 words. Also it is the first of 39 sentences across the entire document. For an ancient writing, this first sentence is not unusual by its length. Paul, himself, will dictate numerous long sentences in the letters associated with him that are found in the New Testament.¹ Those in that world with greater training tended to use more sentences that were unusually long in length.

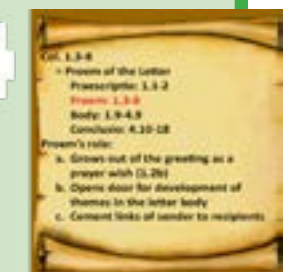
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Colossians 1.3-8 stands as an ancient letter Proem. The interpretive implications of this label will be explored in detail later in section 2.0 Literary. But here we understand the Proem as an expansion of the letter greeting in verse 2b (*χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν*, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father.”) The prayer wish now becomes the assertion of ongoing prayers of thanksgiving for the Colossians. The motivation to build friendly connecting links to ¹What is not clear, in either this document or any of the others identified as Paul’s letters in the New Testament, is precisely how the dictation patterns worked for him. Two basic types of dictation in the ancient world have been identified by modern scholarship. First, the one dictating would provide the writing secretary with a virtual word-by-word dictation. Or, he might simply sketch out in short phrase expressions what he wanted to say and leave the exact wording up to the writing secretary to fill in. In either case, the document would go through revisions before reaching a finalized form that was ready to send out. The high use of standardized phrases in Colossians could be a signal of the latter dictation approach.

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his readers that began in the greeting is now intensified by the Proem. This positive tone will establish an affirming role for the entire letter.

The main clause sets giving thanks to God as the core idea of the Proem. The development of this theme takes on detailed expression in the modifying elements in the rest of the sentence. First, God who is the Father of Jesus Christ is the target of the thanksgiving. Second, a series of adverbial modifiers of the verb Εὐχαριστοῦμεν flesh out the content of the thanksgiving: πάντοτε, “always,”; προσευχόμενοι, “praying,”; and ἀκούσαντες, “having heard.”



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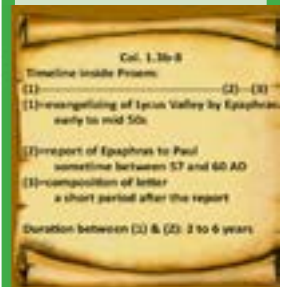


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In the content of verses 3b-8, two time slots are referenced. First, the initial conversion of the Colossians, and second, the report of Epaphras to Paul while in prison some two to five years later. The Colossians began their Christian journey through the preaching of the apostolic Gospel to them by Epaphras, one of their native sons. They were making excellent progress in serving Christ when Epaphras traveled to where Paul was to bring him a report about them.



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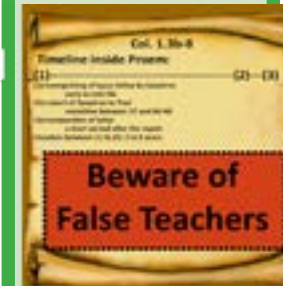


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His glowing report to Paul prompted the apostle to compose a letter to them, commending their progress in serving Christ. Another motivating factor is hinted at in the Proem and described in greater detail in chapter two. There were present in Colossae false teachers with a corrupted version of the Gospel who were trying to entice the believers away from the apostolic Gospel that Epaphras had brought to them. The entire letter has a tone of defending the apostolic Gospel and imploring the Colossians to remain committed to it. Lots of questions arise about the details of this situation at Colossae.



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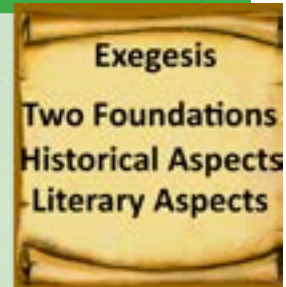
How can we approach the scripture text in order to understand clearly what Paul attempted to say to the Colossians? The interpretive methodology adopted for the BIC commentary project is built off of two foundations. Every written text possesses two

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core elements, a historical aspect and a literary aspect. Both of these contain numerous dimensions which are incorporated into the method. When all of these perspectives are thoroughly analyzed, the interpreter can conclude a historical meaning of the text with high degrees of certainty. Let's take a close look at Colossians 1.3-8 through these different perspectives.



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1.0 Historical.

First, what is history? The ideas of history² in the first century and in the twenty-first century do not coincide with one another. History in the first-century Greek and Roman world was primarily vertical in orientation. That is, it was the record of the dealings of the gods with humanity primarily. One must remember that widely differing ideas of history and how to compile it existed in the Greek and Roman worlds of Paul's day. Within this general mindset, the ancient Jewish view was the dealings of the God of Israel with His covenant people of Israel. Christianity modified this Jewish view because of Christ's work as the Son of God. History now centered on what God was doing through His new covenant people. Of course, people were significant and history is their story. But how they responded to God's intervention into their world remained crucial to their history.

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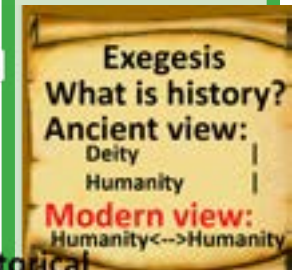


1.0 Historical

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But in western culture, especially since [the Renaissance](#) (mainly 15th and 16th centuries), history has shifted to a horizontal focus in reporting the interactions of people. The assumption of cause-and-effect dynamics between significant human events became an important element of historical inquiry. The twentieth century saw an expansion of history from the more formal narrative of past events, to include more personal social history both individually and collectively. The social sciences have become important sources for historical understanding.

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1.0 Historical

²"History (derived from Ancient Greek ἱστορία (historía) 'inquiry; knowledge acquired by investigation')[1] is the systematic study and documentation of human activity." This definition reflects a twenty-first century view of history, that most of the ancient world would not have agreed with. It was a very religiously oriented culture that always viewed the actions of the divine as ultimately determinative of human actions.

[accessed on March 27, 2023 from "History," [Wikipedia.com](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History)]

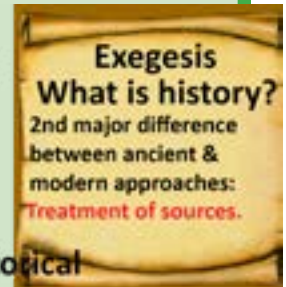
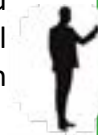
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One other significant difference between ancient and modern views of history is a largely uncritical adoption of sources in the ancient world and a tendency in modern times toward highly critical analysis of sources for determining factual data as the basis of historical reporting. History based on unsubstantiated facts cannot be considered as history.

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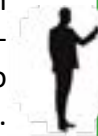


1.0 Historical

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Quite clearly this presents a real challenge to the modern Bible student seeking to understand the history linked to an ancient text. The two approaches to history -- ancient and modern -- are difficult to reconcile. As a Christian interested in biblical history, I must adapt modern approaches in order to be able to grasp the original meaning of the scripture text. I am looking at certain ancient histories from a modern religious vantage point. The primary sources being analyzed are also considered sacred scripture. This brings special considerations into the picture. Although mostly theological in nature, these considerations will play a very influential role in my historical inquiry.³

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1.0 Historical

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Basically, I come to the scripture text expecting to encounter God through this text. When historical interests are the focus of my concern, I look at the scripture text with interest in the human compositional aspects of the text. Modern methods³Central to the theological concerns is the view of divine inspiration. This issue can quickly turn into an unresolvable can of worms. For me, inspiration of scripture means that God guides the production of written documents, but does not override the human aspects of document creation. I adamantly refuse the legitimacy of the label "inerrant." It carries too many secular rationalistic assumptions to have any positive use. The final product of written documents is an expression of religious belief that in spite of its human limitations does have the stamp of God's approval. Thus it can be trusted and considered as a dependable source for historical inquiry. Remember the English term "in-spiration." In the biblical world, this meant that, when these words of scripture were vocalized by a human reader, God filled them with His presence that enabled spiritual transformation for the hearer. For more details, see my article, "[Inspiration](#)," originally appearing in the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*. For a broader survey of the idea of biblical inspiration, see "[Biblical inspiration](#)," Wikipedia.com.

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1.0 Historical



of historical inquiry are applied with limited use of their assumptions. The historical depiction derived from such analysis must make sense to a modern audience.

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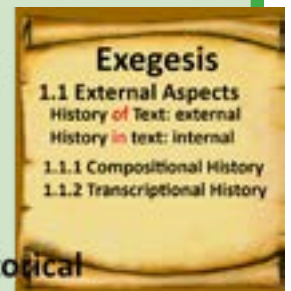
1.1 External Aspects

One must never forget that the history *of* a text is at times very different from the history *in* the text. To be sure, overlapping of these two angles can and does happen. But a clear grasping of the difference should always be in view. The external history will concentrate on the composition of the text initially, and then on how reliably the text was hand copied in subsequent centuries of transmitting the text to different churches.

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1.0 Historical



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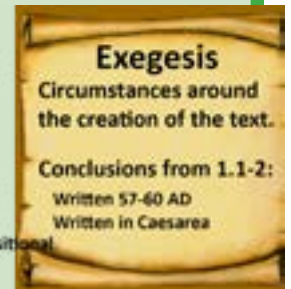
1.1.1 Compositional History

The earlier study of the Praescriptio in 1.1-2 developed a basic scenario for how and when this document was created. The most likely scenario that we concluded in that study is that the Letter to the Colossians was written during Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea sometime during 57-60 AD. This happened after his arrest by Roman authorities in Jerusalem. As a Roman citizen, Paul exercised his right to make his appeal directly to the emperor in Rome. So he remained under guard at the governor's palace in Caesarea until arrangements were made to be transported to Rome in order to make his case before the emperor, who at this point was Nero.

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1.0 Historical
1.1 External
1.1.1 Compositional



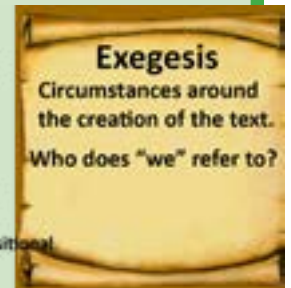
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With Colossians 1.3-8 in mind, the historical concerns center on the identification of the "we" references implicit in the spellings of Εὐχαριστοῦμεν, προσευχόμενοι, and ἀκούσαντες. Most likely, they go back to the letter senders identified in verse one as Paul and Timothy.

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1.0 Historical
1.1 External
1.1.1 Compositional



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From the Proem in 1.3-8, we discover that the arrival of Epaphras in Caesarea from the Lycus River Valley prompted the writing of this letter. His report to the apostle that the positive impact of the Gospel had produced house church groups of genuinely commit-

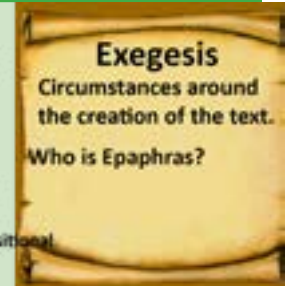
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ted believers in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. This meant flourishing communities of Christians were present in each of the three towns.



1.0 Historical
1.1 External
1.1.1 Compositional



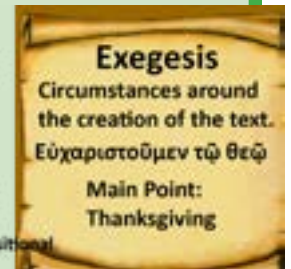
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The single sentence in verses three through eight primarily asserts Paul and Timothy’s thanksgiving for the Colossians. This is the point of the main clause Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ. God is the one being thanked for what He did through Christ at Colossae.



1.0 Historical
1.1 External
1.1.1 Compositional

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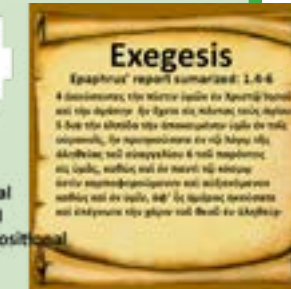
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4 ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους 5 διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, ἣν προηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου 6 τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς, καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ.⁴



1.0 Historical
1.1 External
1.1.1 Compositional

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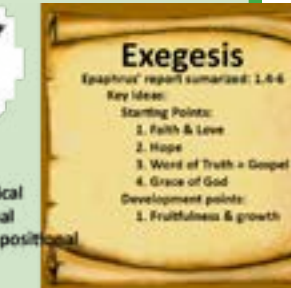
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The primary thrust of the expansion elements attached to the core Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ summarizes Epaphras’ report about the Colossians in verses four through six. It moves from ‘faith and love’ to ‘hope,’ which is central to ‘the Word of Truth,’ which itself is the ‘Gospel.’ At each transition, modifiers are added to flesh out each label. But not only did the Colossians get started on the right foundation, they also were continuing



1.0 Historical
1.1 External
1.1.1 Compositional

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⁴After having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope being stored up for you in Heaven, which you heard earlier in the Word of Truth, the Gospel, 6 which now exists among you, just as also in the world it is being fruitful and growing, so also among you, from the very day you heard and grasped the grace of God in Truth.

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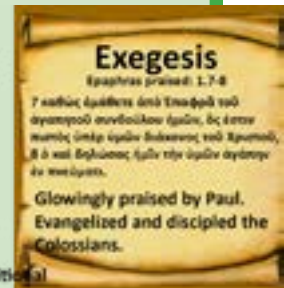


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to develop (τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς...) in their religious life on that foundation.

The native son Ephraim becomes the focus in verses seven and eight. 7 καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν, ὃς ἐστὶν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 8 ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι.⁵ His impeccable character and commitment to Christ are glowingly praised by Paul. He both got the Colossians started on solid ground and stayed with them as he guided them into sustained commitment to Christ. They grew not just in numbers but primarily in spiritual maturity.

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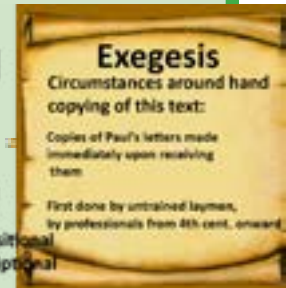
1.0 Historical
1.1 External
1.1.1 Compositional

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1.1.2 Transcriptional Aspects

The second external history aspect studies how reliably the text of these documents was preserved over the centuries until the creation of the printing press. The importance of these documents coming from the apostle Paul was realized immediately upon reaching their intended destinations. Laymen inside the Christian communities volunteered to make hand copies of the documents not just for their groups but so that these documents could be taken to other Christian communities. When the Roman emperor Constantine became a Christian in the early fourth century, the task of hand copying these documents was given to professionally trained scribes. This brought about important changes in the style of writing, the precision of copying, and the materials used for making the copies.

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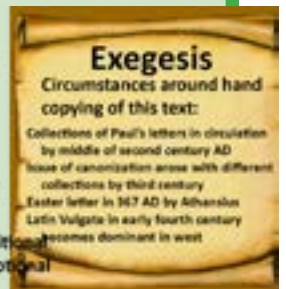


1.0 Historical
1.1 External
1.1.1 Compositional
1.1.2 Transcriptional

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Collections of documents began circulating by the middle of the second century, and by the third century were created on vellum rather than on papyrus leaves. With different collections that did not contain the same documents in circulation, the issue of validity arose. The concept of the canonization of scriptures comes to play an important role in

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1.0 Historical
1.1 External
1.1.1 Compositional
1.1.2 Transcriptional

⁵⁷ Just as you learned from Ephraim, our beloved fellow servant, who is on your behalf a faithful servant of Christ, 8 who also informed us of your love in the Spirit.



the third through fifth centuries. In 367 AD, the bishop of Alexander, Athanasius, set forth in his easter letter to his churches a listing of 27 documents in the sequence of gospel, history, letter, and apocalypse that was generally regarded as the New Testament scriptures. Inside the Roman empire, Latin was the official governmental language, and Western Christianity adopted the Latin translation of these 27 documents by Jerome as the official New Testament. The bishops at Rome emerged over time as the top leader of Christianity in the West. The Council of Trent in 1546 officially adopted the Latin Vulgate as sacred scripture for the Catholic Church. Most Protestant churches follow this listing. With the Bible now in the common language of the people, the tendency toward copying the Greek documents of the New Testament diminished greatly by the eighth century.

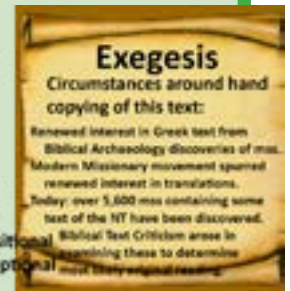
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The Biblical Archaeology movement beginning in the late 1800s is responsible in large part for the discovery of several thousand manuscript pieces across North Africa and the Middle East. With variations in wording, the scholarly discipline of Text Criticism emerged in order to determine the most likely original wording of the Greek text of the New Testament.⁶ Since the earliest existing manuscripts containing most or all of the New Testament only reach back to the third and fourth centuries, we can only examine the copies of the original writing to determine which wording is correct. Altogether over 5,600 manuscripts now can be examined at university libraries and museums in Europe and North America. With the study of a specific text in the New Testament, all relevant manuscripts containing this text must be examined in order to determine the most likely original wording of the passage.

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- 1.0 Historical
- 1.1 External
- 1.1.1 Compositional
- 1.1.2 Transcriptional



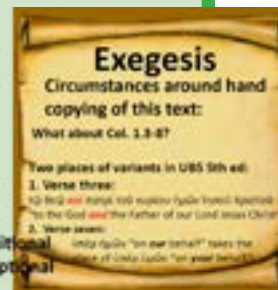
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Now, what about Col. 1.3-8? Basically, the wording has remained very stable over the centuries of hand copying. The critical apparatus of the UBS 5th edition printed text indicates two places where different wording could impact the translation of this passage: verse 3 and verse 7. This Greek New Testament lists variations that may impact the translation of the text.

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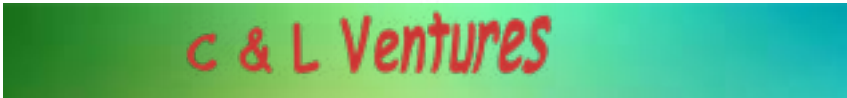


- 1.0 Historical
- 1.1 External
- 1.1.1 Compositional
- 1.1.2 Transcriptional



⁶For more details, see my article "[Modern New Testament Interpretation](#)," originally published in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture* in 2002.

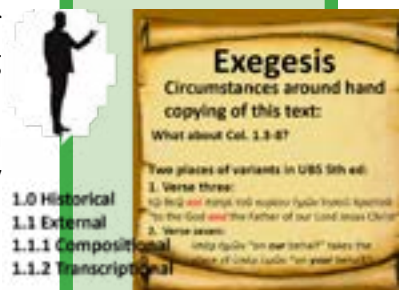
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In verse three, the printed text reading is τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“to God Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”). Some manuscripts,⁷ however, add the connector καὶ between θεῷ and πατρὶ so that the alternative reading becomes τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“to the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”).⁸ With either reading of the text, the meaning remains essentially the same.

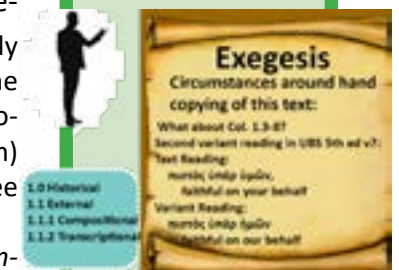
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The other listing in the UBS5th edition Greek New Testament is in verse seven.⁹ A shift in personal pronouns takes place between ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν (“on your behalf”) to ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν (“on our behalf”). The reading adopted for the text, although it is rather narrowly supported (B C* 1739 Augustine), appears to account best for the origin of the other readings. In order to avoid the very unusual collocation of words, some copyists inserted τῷ (D* G 2005 Chrysostom) and others inserted καὶ (κ A C2 Dc I K P Ψ 33 81 614 Byz Lect). (See also the comments on ver. 12 and 3.17.)
[Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 552.]

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⁷This doesn't imply two separate deity references since τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ follows the standard Greek grammar construction for a twofold reference to a single entity: article + noun and + noun. The meaning is clearly “to the God who also is Father...”

⁹Below is a copy of the critical apparatus reading at verse seven. Special training is required in order to read the heavily coded apparatus:

Colossians 1:7
Ἐπαφρᾶ ... Χριστοῦ Col 4:12
³ {B} ὑμῶν κ² C D² Ψ 075 0150 6 33 81 104 256 263 365 424 459 1175 1241 1319 1573 1739 1852 1881 1912 1962 2127 2200 2464 Byz [K L P] Lect it^{ar, b, d, f, o} vg syr^{p, h, pal} cop^{sa, bo} arm eth geo slav Chrysostom Theodoret; Ambrosiaster Pelagius // ἡμῶν P46 κ* A B D* F G 436 I 147 I 591 I 884/1/2 I 921 it^{g, mon} GNB NIV REB EU BJ TOB BTI

[Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament: Apparatus*, Fifth Revised Edition. (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; American Bible Society; United Bible Societies, 2014), 663–664.]

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half").¹⁰ The difference in meaning is between asserting that Epaphras was a faithful servant of Christ on behalf of the Colossians (ὕπερ ὑμῶν) or a faithful servant on Timothy and Paul's behalf (ὕπερ ἡμῶν). The immediate context favors the first understanding, as does both the external and internal manuscript evidence.¹¹ Again, little shift in meaning occurs regardless of the reading that is adopted. Certainly, no change in theological meaning.

The text apparatus of the *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th revised edition) is more detailed and contains eight places where variations of wording exist among the almost five thousand existing copies of the Greek text of this passage.¹² The differences will reflect stylistic 'improvements' by later copyists who primarily sought to bring the Greek text into line with the more natural way it was written in subse-

⁸"Although on the basis of superior Greek evidence (P46 and early Alexandrian and Western authorities) ἡμῶν might seem to be preferable, a majority of the Committee, impressed by the widespread currency of ὑμῶν in versional and patristic witnesses, considered it probable that copyists introduced the first person pronoun under the influence of the preceding ἡμῶν and the following ἡμῖν."

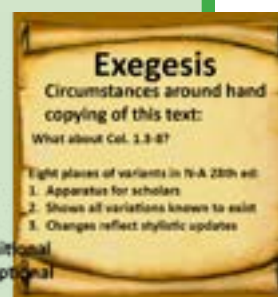
[Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 552-53.]

⁹For those interested in learning more about how this evaluation of evidence is done, see the unit "Introduction to Textual Criticism, in the Greek 202 course that I taught at Gardner-Webb University: <http://cranfordville.com/g202TxtCritStdy.html#Wk1>

¹²*3 Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ ὁ Χριστοῦ πάντοτε ἕπερ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι,* 4 ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ* Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους* 5 διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,* ἣν προηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου* 6 τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς, καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ὁ ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν,* ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ.* 7 καθὼς ὁ ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν,* ὅς ἐστιν πιστὸς ὑπερ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 8 ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι.*

[Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Edition. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), Col 1:3–8.]

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- 1.0 Historical
- 1.1 External
- 1.1.1 Compositional
- 1.1.2 Transcriptional



quent centuries after the original writing in the first century.

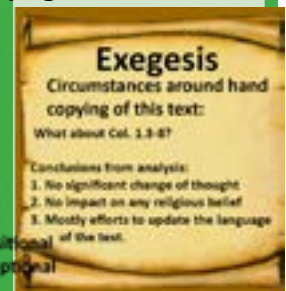
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As should be evident at this point, no significant change of thought occurs in any of the variations. And especially, there is no shift in any religious belief. What we see here is very typical across the entire New Testament. Thus full confidence in the accuracy of the available text reading is possible.

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1.0 Historical
1.1 External
1.1.1 Compositional
1.1.2 Transcriptional



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1.2 Internal History

This perspective focuses on the historical references embedded into the text itself. In 1.3-8, the history established in 1.1-2 is expanded to focus on Epaphras, who is introduced to the reader here in the Proem. His role at the beginning of the church in Colossae and ongoing ministry to it is mentioned. Also, his trip to see Paul while in prison is referenced. Verses four through eight contain this material.

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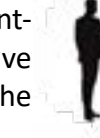
1.0 Historical
1.2 Internal



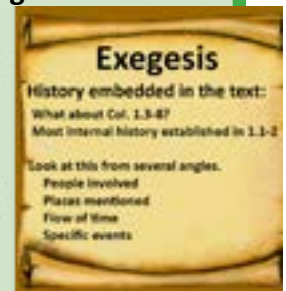
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In order to fully grasp the internal history, several angles of examination are necessary. We need to look at the people mentioned, the places referenced, the flow of time presented, and any specific events that are given. The collective picture developed from these perspectives will enable the construction of a historical narrative implicit in the text.

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1.0 Historical
1.2 Internal



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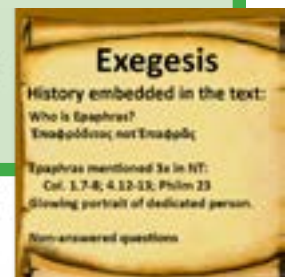
1.2.1 People

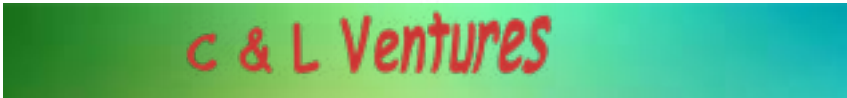
One new person is introduced in 1.3-8. Epaphras becomes the center of attention. Some have considered the Greek name Ἐπαφρᾶς to be a shortened form of Ἐπαφρόδιτος, but this is increasingly disputed by modern scholars. Epaphras is mentioned but three times in the New Testa-

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1.0 Historical
1.2 Internal
1.2.1 People





ment: Colossians 1.7¹³; 4.12-13¹⁴; and Philemon 23¹⁵. All these references are tied to Colossae and together they paint a glowing picture of this individual. He was thoroughly committed to the Colossians, to the apostle Paul, and to the Lord. To be sure, several points of curiosity still remain about him. How was he converted? Where did he first meet the apostle Paul? What were the circumstances of his imprisonment after arriving in Caesarea where Paul was a prisoner? But most of these questions remain unanswered due to a lack of specific data.

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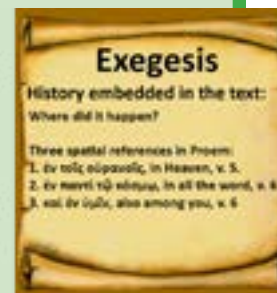
1.2.2 Places

Three references in 1.3-8 contain spatial or locational implications: Heaven, world, and among you. These merit examinations so that we have a clear understanding of the locations mentioned in the text.

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1.0 Historical
1.2 Internal
1.2.1 People
1.2.2 Places



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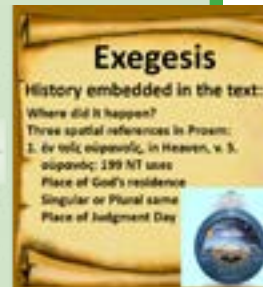
ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, in Heaven, v. 5.

The plural form here of οὐρανός (199 NT uses) is a rather common way of identifying Heaven as the place of residence for

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1.0 Historical
1.2 Internal
1.2.1 People
1.2.2 Places



¹³1.7 καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν, ὃς ἐστὶν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 8 ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι.

7 Just as you learned from Eraphras, our beloved fellow servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on your behalf, 8 who also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

¹⁴4.12 ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ ἐξ ὑμῶν, δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, πάντοτε ἀγωνιζόμενος ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς, ἵνα σταθῆτε τέλειοι καὶ πεπληροφορημένοι ἐν παντί θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ. 13 μαρτυρῶ γὰρ αὐτῷ ὅτι ἔχει πολὺν πόνον ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπόλει.

12 Eraphras sends you greetings, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, always wrestling on your behalf in his prayers, in order that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. For I testify about him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and for those in Hierapolis.

¹⁵ Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, Eraphras sends you greetings, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus.

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God. Although some difference between the singular and plural forms existed in the Jewish literature, the New Testament uses either the singular or the plural to refer to where God lives. But both work off a modification of the commonly held three-level understanding of the universe: the underneath the earth Sheol, the flat earth, and that which is above the earth. It is a very different view than a modern scientifically based view of the universe. The point of the reference to τοῖς οὐρανοῖς here is to stress the depositing by God of believers' hope of eternal blessing for the day of judgment. Continual growth means an ever stronger expectancy of that day of blessing.

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Unlike the Greek and Roman traditions that humans reaching Heaven is virtually an impossibility, and unlike the Jewish teachings that Heaven is attainable only for a select few who perfectly obey the Torah, the apostolic Gospel claimed Heaven for all believers in the resurrected Christ. This message of hope decisively impacted the Colossians who heard Epaphras preaching and teaching it. Numbers of them made commitments to Christ in conversion. Their spiritual growth served to deepen that expectancy.

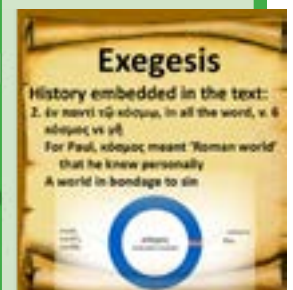
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ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ, in all the word, v. 6
Two ancient Greek words were used in reference to what we would call earth or world: (1) γῆ, earth (240 NT uses); and (2) κόσμος, world (185 in NT). γῆ referenced earth from the substance of soil or dirt. κόσμος referenced earth mainly from the orderly structure of human society vantage point. Both positive and very often negative views of γῆ and especially κόσμος surface particularly in the NT writings of John and Paul. For Paul, 'world' is the place of bondage to sin which is only solvable through the atoning work of Christ.

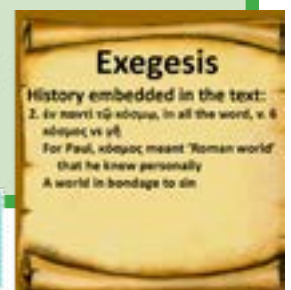
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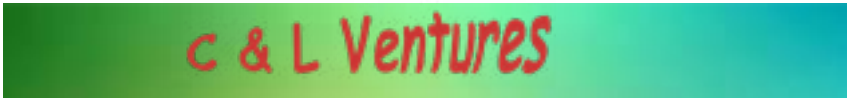
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Here in Colossians 1.6, 'all the world,' referenced the Mediterranean world of the Roman empire. This was Paul's world where he lived and served. And given the geographical limits of Paul's travels during his lifetime, it especially stressed the eastern half of that ancient world. This world he knew and understood. It was fundamental evil and in bondage to sin. It desperately needed the liberation from that

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bondage which could only be realized in Christ. His encouragement was that the conversion of the Colossians was part of that liberation being experienced all over his world via the preaching of the apostolic Gospel.

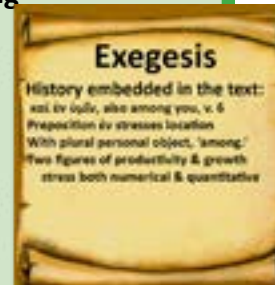
καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, also among you, v. 6

This phrase stands in parallel to the above καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ. The spatial oriented preposition ἐν stresses location with plural objects such as ὑμῖν. Quite naturally this references the house church groups located in the ancient town of Colossae. The phrase is attached by implication to the verbal images of fruit bearing and growth. Thus the Christian community at Colossae was productive and expanding. But what does this mean? The two images of καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον imply both numerical and qualitative expansion. Their numbers were regularly increasing at Colossae. But also the converts were consistently maturing in their Christian faith. Through Epaphras' and others guidance they were understanding more and more about being Christian. And what they learned, they implemented into their daily living.

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1.0 Historical
1.2 Internal
1.2.1 People
1.2.2 Places

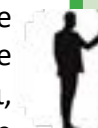


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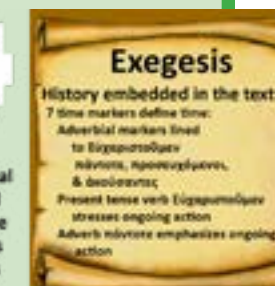
1.2.3 Times

At least seven time markers surface in 1.3-8. First, there are the temporal adverbial markers attached to the present tense main clause verb Εὐχαριστοῦμεν: πάντοτε, προσευχόμενοι, and ἀκούσαντες. These define time in different ways. The adverb πάντοτε (v3) specifies continuous action and stresses further the continual action of giving thanks that is already affirmed by the present tense of the verb Εὐχαριστοῦμεν. The contextual nature of the ongoing action suggests a regular pattern of offering prayers up to God. For the Jewish Paul, this most likely meant three times daily. It would also include any additional prayers offered up beyond these set times for daily prayers.

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1.0 Historical
1.2 Internal
1.2.1 People
1.2.2 Places
1.2.3 Times



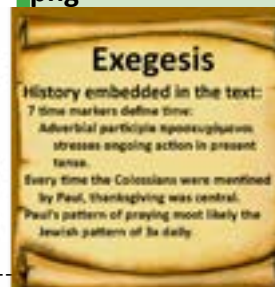
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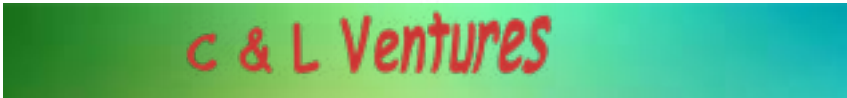
Then there is the present tense participle προσευχόμενοι (v3) as an adverbial modifier of the core verb. This participle defines ongoing prayers that are περὶ ὑμῶν, "for you." Every mention of the Colossians in Paul's prayers contains expressions of thanksgiving to God.

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1.0 Historical
1.2 Internal
1.2.1 People
1.2.2 Places
1.2.3 Times

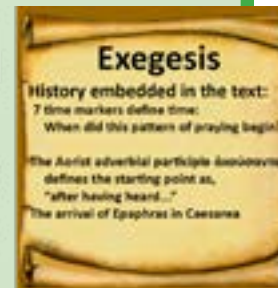




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When did this prayer pattern begin? The second aorist participle ἀκούσαντες (v4) inherently defines the starting point of these prayers of thanksgiving: “after having heard of your faith and love.” This alludes to the reporting given to the apostle upon the arrival of Epaphras to Caesarea, that is defined specifically in verse eight by another aorist participle ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν, “the one who also informed us.”

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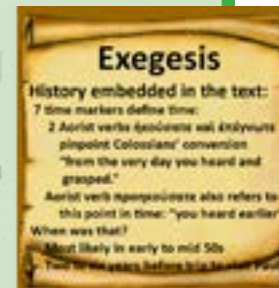


Historical
Internal
1 People
2 Places
3 Times

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Another pair of aorist verbs ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωντε (v6) pinpoint the time of conversion initially by the Colossians: “from the very day you heard and grasped God’s grace...”. Contextually, this refers back to the beginning evangelistic ministry of Epaphras in the Lycus River Valley. When was this? Evidently, after Epaphras had become a Christian and came under the influence of the apostle Paul. Perhaps, this was some two to five years prior to his visit to Paul in prison. This would have been during Paul’s lengthy two-plus years of ministry in Ephesus in the early 50s. Luke describes this with considerable detail in chapters nineteen and twenty of the book of Acts. Additionally, the aorist verb προηκούσατε, “you heard earlier,” (v5) alludes to this same point of time.

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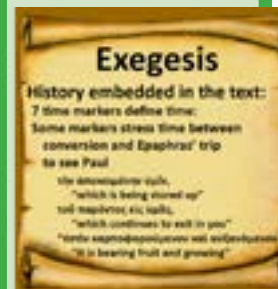


1.0 Historical
1.2 Internal
1.2.1 People
1.2.2 Places
1.2.3 Times

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Second, some markers emphasize the period from conversion to Epaphras’ visit to Paul. Just how long this period was is not given directly in the scripture text. The present tense of some of the participles gives emphasis to this extended period of time: τὴν ἀποκεκμένην ὑμῖν, “which is being stored up” (v.5); τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς, “which continues to exist in you” (v.6); and especially ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον, “is bearing fruit and growing” (v. 6). Good things continued to happen to the Colossian believers after turning to Christ. These began at conversion and were continuing when Epaphras traveled to see Paul.

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1.0 Historical
1.2 Internal
1.2.1 People
1.2.2 Places
1.2.3 Times



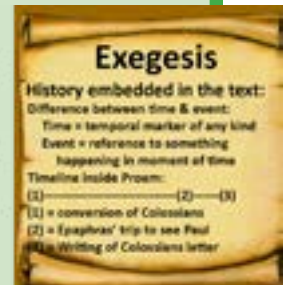
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1.2.4 Events

The difference between events and times is that times refer to general time markers, while events refer to specific happenings inside a time frame. Normally, they represent significant occurrences. Special things are associated with time markers that can be called events.

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- 1.0 Historical
- 1.2 Internal
- 1.2.1 People
- 1.2.2 Places
- 1.2.3 Times
- 1.2.4 Events

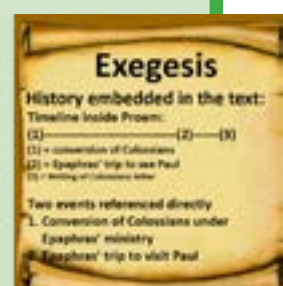


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In this Proem of Colossians, two significant events are referenced, along with the intervening time between the two. These events are the beginnings of Christianity in the Lycus River Valley and the visit of Epaphras to the imprisoned Paul. While some details are supplied in the text, and related scriptures, there are several details not reported that our modern minds would like to know about. A few of these details may be surmised indirectly for creating a timeline by appealing to other ancient sources.

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- 1.0 Historical
- 1.2 Internal
- 1.2.1 People
- 1.2.2 Places
- 1.2.3 Times
- 1.2.4 Events

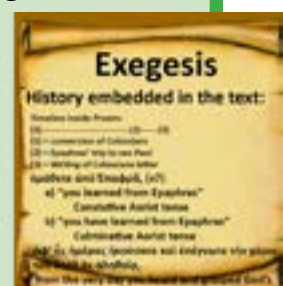


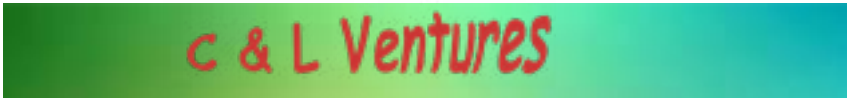
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The clearest reference to the beginning point comes in the aorist tense verb ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ, “you learned from Epaphras” (v.7). The punctiliar action embedded in this Greek tense form denotes clearly a starting point (Constative function). But the context here allows for an extension of the idea so that it also covers the subsequent time period to the completed action with emphasis upon lasting consequences of the completed action (Consumative function). We don’t have anything comparable to this idea in the English language. The closest idea in English is the perfect tense with an emphasis upon the completion of action. Thus ἐμάθετε could be translated as “you have learned” rather than “you learned.” Another clear indication of the beginning point is seen in the relative clause in v. 6: ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, “from the very day you heard and grasped the grace of God in Truth.” This clause marks the beginning of fruitfulness and growth among the Colossian believers. Together these two references reference an initial ministry of Epaphras in the town that led to the conversion of residents there.

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- 1.0 Historical
- 1.2 Internal
- 1.2.1 People
- 1.2.2 Places
- 1.2.3 Times
- 1.2.4 Events





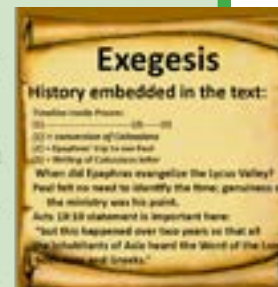
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This raises the question of When did this happen? Paul felt no need to provide more time details about this successful ministry of Epaphras. His targeted readers already knew this. He merely affirms that he now also knew about the beginning point through the reporting to him by Epaphras. The genuineness of this beginning point is the most important aspect for Paul. A statement is made by Luke in Acts 19:10 that has possible bearing here: τοῦτο δὲ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ ἔτη δύο, ὥστε πάντας τοὺς κατοικοῦντας τὴν Ἀσίαν ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου, Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἕλληνας, “but this happened over two years so that all the inhabitants of Asia heard the Word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” The Gospel preaching of Paul in Ephesus fanned out over the entirety of the Roman province of Asia, which included the Lycus River Valley some hundred miles east of Ephesus. As individuals from across the province traveled to the central port city of Ephesus, they came in contact at least with the apostolic preaching of the Gospel either directly by Paul or from one of his workers.

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- 1.0 Historical
- 1.2 Internal
- 1.2.1 People
- 1.2.2 Places
- 1.2.3 Times
- 1.2.4 Events



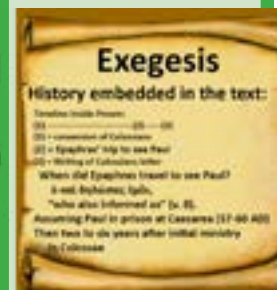
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The terminus of the timeframe implicit in 1.3-8 is the arrival of Epaphras to where Paul was in prison. In 1.1-2, we concluded that most likely this was at Caesarea (57-60 AD). The clearest reference to this is the aorist participle ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν, “who also informed us” (v. 8). The lengthy Ephesian ministry of Paul took place in the early to mid-fifties. So about a little less than a decade of time elapses between the two time points treated in the Proem. During that time Epaphras was teaching and preaching the apostolic Gospel across the Lycus River Valley with dramatic results in conversions and spiritual development of the converts.

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- 1.0 Historical
- 1.2 Internal
- 1.2.1 People
- 1.2.2 Places
- 1.2.3 Times
- 1.2.4 Events



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The news that Epaphras brought to Paul prompted him to dictate a letter to Timothy that would be carried back and read to the various house church groups. Epaphras would have been a logical person to take the letter to Colossae. But an insight from Philemon 23 signals why he did not return back to Colossae. In the companion letter to Philemon who lived at Colossae, Epaphras is identified by Paul as ὁ συναϊχμάλωτός μου, “my fellow prisoner.” Upon his arrival at Caesarea, Epaphras had himself been taken prisoner by the Roman authorities. To be sure, we know nothing about the details, beyond the implication of the term used here implying a shared im-

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- 1.0 Historical
- 1.2 Internal
- 1.2.1 People
- 1.2.2 Places
- 1.2.3 Times
- 1.2.4 Events





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prisonment.

One possible detail emerges from the discussion about false teachers being active at Colossae (see chapter two.). Epaphras may very well have felt the need for Paul’s advice on how to deal with these people. This may then have prompted the trip to Caesarea to see Paul. Two phrases in the Proem hint at this issue, which is developed in chapter two: ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας, “by the Word of Truth, (v.5), and ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, “in Truth,” (v6). To be sure, it isn’t clear that this issue necessitated the trip to visit Paul. Paul’s treatment of the matter of false teachers in the town does not overshadow the basic positive thrust of the letter as an appreciation of the Colossians’ steadfast commitment to the apostolic Gospel first brought to them by Epaphras, and was now expanded with more details in this letter.

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- 1.0 Historical
- 1.2 Internal
- 1.2.1 People
- 1.2.2 Places
- 1.2.3 Times
- 1.2.4 Events



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Paul’s words in the Proem provide a quick glance at the report made to him by Epaphras about the situation in the Lycus River Valley region of the Roman province of Asia. This report became the basis for the content of the letter as Paul interpreted what Epaphras told him. Thus it is very understandable why Paul concludes with high praise of Epaphras. What isn’t possible to do, but would be very interesting is to compare the Colossians’ letter to a transcript of the verbal reporting of Epaphras.

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- 1.0 Historical
- 1.2 Internal
- 1.2.1 People
- 1.2.2 Places
- 1.2.3 Times
- 1.2.4 Events



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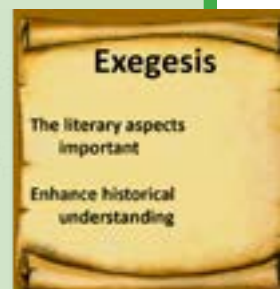
2.0 Literary Aspects

Now let’s take a look at the Proem from the literary aspects of the text. This will enhance our historical understanding of the text. Again the external / internal perspectives guide our inquiry.

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- 1.0 Historical
- 2.0 Literary





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2.1 External Aspects

These features focus on how this unit of text relates to similar texts in the Greek literature of the ancient world. Beyond a common language, there will be similarities of forms and patterns between this text in Colossians and other writings of Paul as well as in the larger body of ancient literature. So a lot of reading in this larger group of ancient writings becomes necessary.

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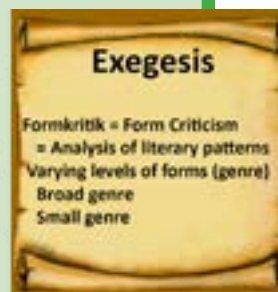


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2.1.1 Identify the literary form of the text.

Somewhat over two centuries ago, a scholarly discipline labeled originally Formkritik from its German origins emerged. It signaled the attempt to systematically identify widely established patterns of expression across this large body of literature. Students of this literature had noticed most of these patterns for many centuries, but did not analyze their possible importance for interpretive understanding. These patterns are found varying levels of inclusiveness and complexity. Scholarly form critics categorized these into broad genre and small or narrow genre. In the present status of Form Criticism, varying applications of this method will be considered relevant to biblical studies.

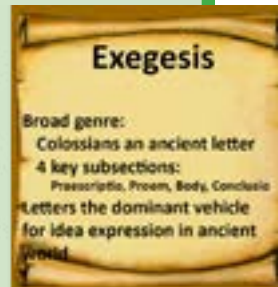
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From the BIC commentary on the Praescriptio in 1.1-2, we concluded clearly that this document called Paul's Letter to the Colossians is cast in the form of an ancient letter, at the broad genre level. It contains the four key subsections of an ancient letter: Praescriptio (1.1-2), Proem (1.3-8), letter body (1.9-4.9), and Conclusio (4.10-18). Additionally, it adheres closely in basic form to the other letters of Paul found in the New Testament. The ancient world of letters reveals a tremendous amount of creativity in fleshing out these four sections. The same is true for the letters of Paul in the New Testament. Technical study of this broad genre of letter has demonstrated the dominating role that ancient letters played in communicating ideas of every kind in that world. Post apostolic Christianity for the next several centuries illustrates this trend in that most of these documents were cast in the form of a letter. Additionally, even inside the New Testament, there are two documents which overall typified ancient Jewish sermons but are superficially recast by the authors in the form of a letter: James

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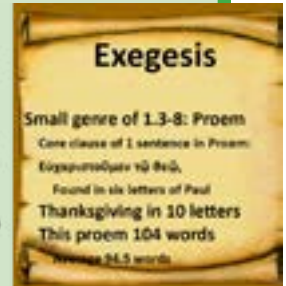
(Praescriptio in 1.1) and Hebrews (Conclusio in 13:18-25).

The Proem of Colossians 1.3-8 adheres to a majority of similar elements in the rest of Paul’s letters. The core clause of the singular sentence of verses three through eight, Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ, “we give thanks to God,” is found in six of Paul’s letters either in the singular or plural form of the verb. Plus a modified form of expressing thanksgiving is found in three other letters of Paul. In four of Paul’s letters, the Proem is made up of only one sentence. This thanksgiving is usually expressed in an unusually long sentence, as is done in Col. 1.3-8. On average this Proem sentence is approximately 94.5 words long in Paul’s letters. At 104 words, Colossians is above average in length. Yet, in the ancient Greek literary world, this is not a lengthy sentence at all. To be sure, such sentences represent a nightmare to the modern Bible translator dealing with modern languages where sentences cannot be this long, and make any sense to the reader.

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1.0 Historical
2.0 Literary
2.1 External
2.1.2 Form ID



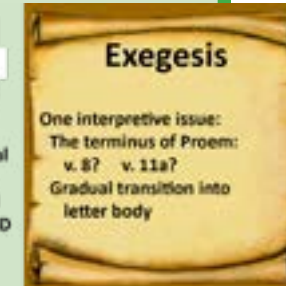
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One disputed issue here among modern scholars is the terminus point of the Proem and the beginning of the letter body. A part of the issue stems from Paul’s occasional tendency to move from thanksgiving to intercession inside the Proem. Does the Proem in Colossians end at verse eight or at verse eleven? At first glance, 1.9-11a seems to be intercession as part two of the Proem. Yet, a close examination of this sentence reveals a subtle shift of emphasis. There is intercession expressed with προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, ἵνα πληρωθῆτε, “praying and asking, so that you may be filled.” Clearly, in the following sentence found in 1.11b-14 (11b-20), the theme of thanksgiving is re-introduced, but this time the focus is on God and what He has accomplished through Christ. At this point, the apostle is moving into the letter body with the expansion of some of the implications found in both the Praescriptio and Proem. Conclusion? The ending point of the Proem is left ambiguous with a gradual transition into the letter body. This, rather than the usual clear transition.

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1.0 Historical
2.0 Literary
2.1 External
2.1.2 Form ID



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2.1.2 Analyze the role of the text as a form.

Once a specific form has been identified, what next? The insights gleaned from Form Critical analysis would assert the basic function of a letter Proem to deepen the bond of connection between the letter sender and the letter recipient. This was

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first signaled in the Salutatio, that is, the Greeting of the Praescriptio. The expression of a prayer-wish in the greeting naturally evolves into the more detailed prayer that makes up the Proem. Thanksgiving is the basic theme of all of the proems in the letters of Paul sent to groups of people. Joy is the alternative theme in the letters to Timothy. The one exception is the letter to the Galatian churches, where astonishment (Θαυμάζω) and no thanksgiving is expressed in a substitute proem (1.6-9). A second role for the letter Proem, especially as Paul uses it, is to suggest even further possible issues to be brought up in the letter body.

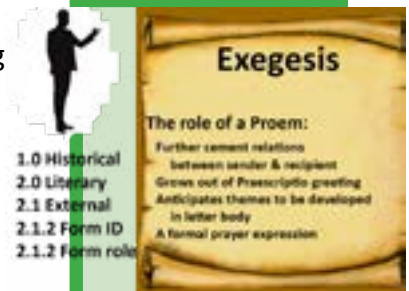
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Both objectives are clearly evident in the Proem of Colossians. The general theme of salvation (σωτηρία), first signaled in the Praescriptio, is here expanded with greater detail in the Proem. It involves human faith, love, and hope. It is centered in Christ Jesus. It is a life-changing and ongoing commitment to God that pushes us to love other people around us. It is found only in the apostolic Gospel preached as the Word of Truth. Epaphras faithfully delivered that message in the Lycus River Valley which led to the establishment of several house-church groups of believers serving God as Christians. Upon learning about them, Paul develops a deep love for these people that motivates him to both thank God for them and to pray for their continued growth. These expressions in the Proem certainly lay the foundation for expansion in the letter body.

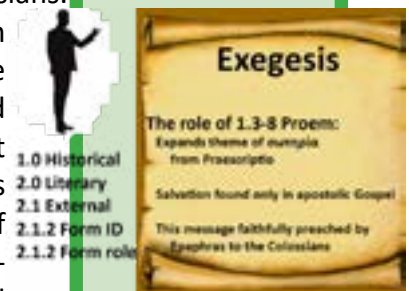
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2.2 Internal Aspects: Literary Structure

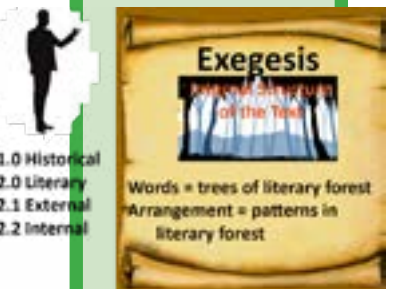
Now we are ready to examine the contents of the Proem from a literary angle. This is comparable to examining a forest. We take a look at the individual trees, and then a holistic look in order to detect patterns in the arrangement of those trees. This will provide helpful insight into the message of the text.

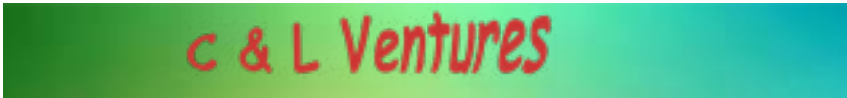


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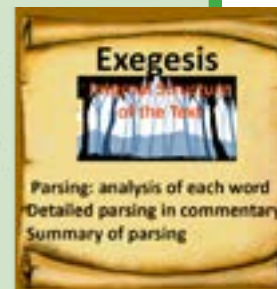
2.2.1 Develop understanding of the wording of the text.

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To examine each tree of this literary forest we must parse each Greek word of the original language text. This has already been done in [the BIC commentary](#), and is available online as [a separate pdf](#) file as well. Here we will summarize the results of this analysis.



- 1.0 Historical
- 2.0 Literary
- 2.1 External
- 2.2 Internal
- 2.2.1 Words



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How Paul used the distinctions between the Greek present tense and the aorist tense to set up the timeframe inside the Proem is very interesting. Altogether there are fifteen verbs and verbals in the text. Nine are present tense and six are aorist tense forms. Fundamentally the ancient Greek present tense pictures time as a process, often with no defined beginning or ending. But the ancient Greek aorist tense pictures time as a completed action, much in the fashion of an event. In this text, the aorist tense forms specify either Epaphras' report to Paul upon arriving at Caesarea (ἀκούσαντες, "after having heard," v. 4; δηλώσας, "informed"), or the initial evangelizing ministry earlier by Epaphras in Colossae (ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε, "you heard and grasped," v. 6; προηκούσατε, "you heard earlier," v. 5). Thus by the aorist tense the beginning and ending termini of the timeframe covered in the Proem are set up by Paul.

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- 1.0 Historical
- 2.0 Literary
- 2.1 External
- 2.2 Internal
- 2.2.1 Words



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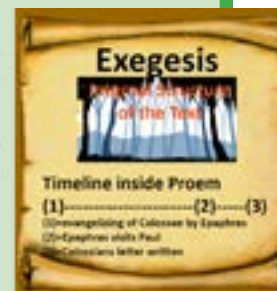
The timeframe of the Proem can be charted out as follows: (1)------(2)------(3)

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One equals the initial ministry of Epaphras' evangelizing the Lycus River Valley. This took place most likely in the early to middle 50s.

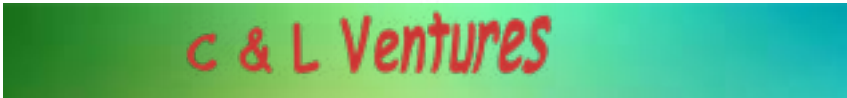


- 1.0 Historical
- 2.0 Literary
- 2.1 External
- 2.2 Internal
- 2.2.1 Words



Two equals the arrival of Epaphras in Caesarea where he reported to Paul and Timothy what was happening in Colossae. This took place sometime from 57 to 60 AD. Some three to six years took place between points 1 and 2.

Three equals the time of the writing of the Colossians letter as Paul's response to Epaphras' report. How long a period of time that elapsed between the report and the letter could not have been very long. Yet, the Letter to the Ephesians along with the



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tended to affirm the correctness of the Colossians’ acceptance of the apostolic Gospel preached to them by Epaphras. They didn’t need any alteration of this message. Its roots in the apostolic commissioning of Paul by God (v1) and passed on to them by Epaphras (vv4-8) put them on the correct path to eternal salvation.

2.2.2 Assess the structural arrangement of the text.

Although different ways of doing this exist, the use of the Block Diagram provides a clear visual picture of the arrangement. For a separate copy of the complete diagram of Colossians 1.3-8, see the online pdf files “[Block Diagram: Greek Text](#)” and “[Block Diagram: English Text](#).” Here we will summarize observations derived from the diagram. This single sentence in verses three through eight flows off of the first three Greek words Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ, “we give thanks to God.” Everything else in the sentence develops out of this core idea. Two expansions are attached to these three words. First, as adjectival expansion of τῷ θεῷ, “to God,” comes πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God is not only our Heavenly Father (πατὴρ ἡμῶν, v. 2), but also of Jesus Christ who is our Lord. And these relationships are more intense since πατὴρ is an appositive modifier of θεῷ parallel to θεοῦ πατὴρ in v. 2.

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- 1.0 Historical
- 2.0 Literary
- 2.1 External
- 2.2 Internal
- 2.2.1 Words
- 2.2.2 Arrangement



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The verb Εὐχαριστοῦμεν has the bulk of the expansions attached to it as adverbial modifiers. These modifiers are the temporal adverb πάντοτε, “always;” the adverbial temporal participle προσευχόμενοι, “as we are praying;” and the adverbial temporal participle ἀκούσαντες, “after having heard.” This last participle references the report of Epaphras upon his visit to Paul. It then is greatly expanded in verses four through eight by numerous subordinate clause expressions. Their faith and love are grounded in hope. This triad stands as the heart of Word of Truth, which is the apostolic Gospel. This message is expanding across Paul’s world as well as in Colossae since its initial arrival there. In essence, this Gospel proclaims God’s grace. Epaphras has faithfully proclaimed it to the Colossians from the beginning. Upon his arrival at Caesarea, he reported all this to Paul, along with their love for the apostle whom they had not seen in person. This sentence stands as Paul’s prayer of thanksgiving to God for the

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- 1.0 Historical
- 2.0 Literary
- 2.1 External
- 2.2 Internal
- 2.2.1 Words
- 2.2.2 Arrangement





Colossians.

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2.2.3 Assess the contextual role of the text.

The final literary angle that we will explore has to do with the contextual role of this text to the remainder of the document. We have identified 1.3-8 as the letter Proem. Why was this element added to most ancient letters? To be sure, it always is in the form of a prayer offered up to deity, normally on behalf of the letter recipient. In non-religious letters, it usually takes the form of a prayer for health () and/or prosperity. But in the letters of Paul, the dominant emphasis is upon thanksgiving to God for the recipients. For Paul, thanksgiving flows out of the prayer-wish in the greeting for the continuation of grace and peace. Additionally, the Proem in Paul’s letters contains previews of themes to be treated in the letter body.

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That is clearly found in the Proem of Colossians. The very basic idea of God’s grace and peace continuing to flow into the lives of the Colossian believers, which is expressed in the greeting, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν (v2b), is expanded into a summary glance of their conversion and ongoing growth contained in the Proem. This core idea then becomes foundational for the content of the letter body, which is largely an appeal for them to stay put in this apostolic Gospel. At the end of the Proem in verse eight, Paul begins transitioning into the letter body with verses nine through eleven. Some repetition with similar phrases from the Proem surfaces. For example, ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν, in v.9 with ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε in v. 6. Also ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι in v. 9 with περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, in v. 3. But these also tend to point in a slightly different direction in verses nine through fourteen. This begins the more detailed development of the larger theme of salvation.

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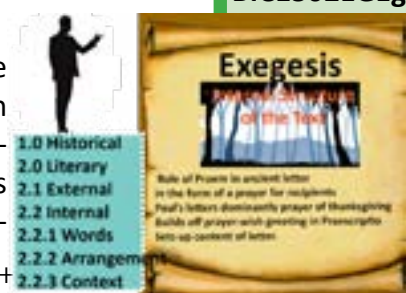


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Summary Conclusion

With thanksgiving for the Colossians put on the table in the Proem, Paul is ready to elaborate on the Gospel message that the Colossians had accepted from Epaphras. He will proceed to do this beginning in 1.9. But not in a wooden, rigid man-

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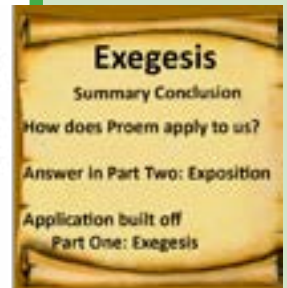
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ner. In a very creative fashion, he builds the picture of salvation in the apostolic Gospel, stroke by stroke, organized around the typical twofold structure of faith and practice. One should remember that this is a letter, and not a systematic treatise. The strokes used are addressing the very real situation at Colossae. To be sure, some more details about salvation get mixed in through the reading of Ephesians, Philemon, and the letter to the Laodiceans in a bundle with Colossians. But this letter addresses the church at Colossae as it existed in the late 50s of the first century.

So how does this text apply to us almost two thousand years later? The answer to this question will come in the part two exposition of this text. In this subsequent study, both methods for applying a text and potential applications of this Proem are explored. Remember that exegesis refers to developing a historical meaning of the text, while exposition refers to making modern applications of this text. This range of possible applications must stand within the limits of spiritual meaning derived from the exegesis conclusions. Summarizing the insights from the exposition of the Proem that are found in part two of the BIC commentary will be the intent of video two on the Proem. I think you will be pleasantly surprised to discover just how relevant the Proem of Colossians is to our modern church experience.

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